Celtic Legacy in Galicia

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Abstract

The paper focuses on Galicia in northwestern Spain, whose position within the Celtic world has long been the subject of contention. Many scholars have described the region's strong Celtic heritage, but the institutions of pan-Celticism have expressed what has often amounted to overt hostility to Galicia's claim to be a Celtic nation. Historical, linguistic, archaeological, socio-cultural and religious sources of evidence are considered in this study in an attempt to support Galicia's claims to membership in the league of Celtic nations.

Keywords

Bronze-Age Atlantic zone, Galicia, Celtic, pan-Celticism, Bretoña, hill-forts, round-houses

Introduction

The adjective Celtic has been applied to peoples from Scotland and Ireland in the northwest of Europe to those of the Iberian Peninsula in the southern part of the continent or Anatolia in Asia to the east, and from the Urnfield period (end of the second millennium-/early first millennium) to the present. Bettina Arnold and Blair Gibson note that the term has different and often contradictory meanings in different contexts, and that linguists, social anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, folklorists and others use it according to how they perceive it (1995:2). In fact, the term Celtic is problematic and often ambiguous. To begin with, the strictly linguistic definition devised originally by the academic world was driven as much by nineteenth century romantic ideas of language as the basis of national identity as it was by the scientific analysis of European language groups. Moreover, the term rapidly came to encompass literature as well as language in both academic and popular usage, together with many other aspects of non-material and material culture, in effect identifying or even creating a "Celtic" ethnic identity and expanding the scope of Celtic Studies to an interdisciplinary Area Study.

Additionally, there has been of late an explosion of self-asserting Celtic identities, ranging from the practice of "Celtic spirituality" (both Christian and Pagan) to the performance of Celtic music and other art forms (Hale and Payton 2000). Part of this complexity is reflected in pan-Celticism, the notion that the various Celtic lands have much in common (not only with respect to linguistic affinity but in terms of their wider cultural, historical and political experiences), a commonality that organizations today such as the Celtic Congress (founded at the National Eisteddfod at Cardiff in 1899 and still active; it has socio-cultural and quasi-political aims) and the Celtic League (a political pan-Celtic movement founded in 1961 in Brittany, with close connections with the various national parties) believe should be fostered and given further expression in the creation of new cultural or political ties. Such organizations have tended to set themselves up as the custodians of Celticity, guarding their self-appointed right to adjudicate as to who or what might legitimately be labelled "Celtic". At the same time, activists and enthusiasts within the self-defined Celtic nations have sought to claim common cause with one another, creating or joining pan-Celtic organizations to promote such contact and exchange.

However, this process has not been without difficulties. The resistance at the beginning of the twentieth century to recognition of Cornwall's status as a Celtic nation has been already discussed by Amy Hale (1997a

and b), while the more recent attempts by the boundary-keepers of Celticity to resist the claims of Galicia and other self-defining "Celtic" areas of the Iberian peninsula have been documented in Berresford Ellis' unsympathetic discussion of the issue (1993a: 19-27). The fact is that Galicia did lose the Celtic language spoken there when the Romans conquered the area and imposed Latin, as they also had done in Gaul. A parallel process took place in Britain with the arrival of Angles and Saxons and the imposition of English, a language that completely replaced Cornish and Manx, and unfortunately is still making inroads upon the remaining Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland and Ireland.

Fortunately, this repudiation has not prevented the continuing assertion of a Galician Celtic identity by both popular and academic practitioners. In fact, today, after more than two millennia, that sense of Celtic belonging is still present. The ancient Celtic inhabitants of *Gallaecia*, like those of Gaul, faded out of history after being conquered by the Romans. However, they did not vanish. They persisted, endured and continued exist, even after the tremendous shock received and the new circumstances. They are still there somehow, judging by the considerable Celtic echoes still present in the fields of mythology and folklore (Alberro 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b).

A major feature of the articulation of a Galician Celtic identity is its comparative element, the attempt to locate Galicia as an integral part of an Atlantic-edged world and to identify archaeological, historical, cultural, mythological, folkloric and other similarities with the other Celtic lands. In fact, as described below, social and commercial relations between the populations of northwest Iberia and those of Armorica (modern-day Brittany), Cornwall, Wales, the Isle of Man, Scotland and Ireland date back to prehistoric times (Eogan 1982: 95, 117; Macalister 1921: 116). Those ancient connections continued during the Bronze Age, when these geographic regions were components of what scholars call the Atlantic Area, a well-defined socio-cultural and commercial zone which lasted for at least three millennia (Cunliffe 1997: 148 and 2001: 60; Koch 1991: 18-19).

Ancient literary sources: geographers, historians and maritime explorers

The first historical use of the term Celts is usually attributed to Herodotus (c. 490-425 BC). Hecataeus, who lived a little earlier (c. 540-475 BC), mentions in his *Geographia* (known through later quotations) the Greek colony of Massilia in the land of the Ligurians near the land of the Celts, and a Celtic town called Nyrax (Powell 1983:13-14). These sources use the term *Keltoi*, whereas later Greek authors, especially in the east, speak of *Galatai* or *Galetai*. The Romans refer to *Galli*, but Julius Caesar states that the *Galli* of Gaul called themselves *Celtae* (Fischer 1995:34). The name Celti, which survived in southwestern Spain into Roman times, is, according to Powell (1983:15), the only case where this people had a geographic region named after them. However, as described below, the *Gallaeci* gave their name to a large region in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula in the Emperor Diocletian's time (*Gallaecia*, today's Galicia).

Linguistic reconstructions

Many Celticists assign primarily linguistic significance to the term Celtic in reference to those groups of ancient peoples known to have spoken Celtic languages (Dillon and Chadwick 1973:2-3; Evans 1977: 67). The earliest written texts of a Celtic language found to date are Gaulish and Celtiberian, from approximately 300

BC on, and consist of small fragments very difficult to interpret. Until recently, the longest extant text was the large bronze known as the Coligny Calendar, found in the town of the same name in the Department of Ain in south-eastern France, which contains over sixty words, some of them repeated. Beginning in 1970, four bronze tablets were found in the old Celtiberian location of Contrebia Belaisca, today Botorrita, near Zaragoza, Spain. Bronze II, in Latin, is dated to 87 BC while the remaining three carry Celtiberian texts written with Iberian symbols. Botorrita Bronze III, discovered in 1992, contains the longest text available in any of the Celtic dialects (Beltrán, Tovar and Porta 1981:51-84; Beltrán, de Hoz and Untermann 1996; Eska 1989; Jordán Cólera 2004: 326ff; Meid 1993; Villar et al. 2001).

In the Hispano-Celtic or Celtiberian language spoken in the Iberian Peninsula, a branch of Indo-European, the change from the archaic labio-velar q to the bilabial p that took place in all the other Celtic languages with the exception of the Irish Gaelic did not occur (Koch 1991:19; Mallory 1989: 95-106, 1991:53). This suggests an early presence of the Celts in the Iberian Peninsula (Mallory 1989:105-6), which is corroborated by linguistic evidence obtained during the last decades (Lenerz-de Wilde 1996: 533-51). An archaic form of q-Celtic, as indicated by the numerous *-briga* endings, continued to be spoken in Spain until the second century AD, although cases of later p-Celtic also appear in some placenames of the *-dunum* type (Lorrio 1997:46; Rankin 1996:168; Tovar 1949: *passim,* 1961:98).

However, the use of language as the essential element in defining what is Celtic is not universally accepted within academic circles. Even the well-known linguist and Celtic scholar D. Ellis Evans admits that "the term Celt is at best vague and it has too easily, but improperly, been claimed by some scholars that it should, strictly speaking, have a linguistic connotation only" (Evans 1996: 9). Thus, it is clear that this definition needs to be supplemented by historical and archaeological data.

For archaeologists, on the other hand, the term Celtic refers to peoples sharing a common material culture and a distinctive art style who inhabited some areas of central and western Europe, Ireland and the British Isles from the Late Hallstatt period until Roman contact. Most commonly, the term designates the artistically and culturally refined late La Tène cultural complex from c. 400 BC on (Arnold and Gibson 1995:2; Brun 1995: 13).

Celts and Celtiberians in the Iberian Peninsula

There are still some questions about the origin and nature of the Celtic population of the Iberian Peninsula that bring into focus the relationship between language, ethnicity, and archaeology. Classical writers often refer to the Celtiberians, the Celtic language that was spoken in many areas, and social systems detected there correspond to those of the historical Celts in continental Europe. However, the material culture of the Celts of Hispania differed significantly from that of the La Tène Celts. Cunliffe was among the first to point out that "In considering the problem in the Peninsula ... it is necessary to dissociate La Tène material culture from the concept of 'Celtic' and in doing so the nature and significance of the Celtic language are inevitably raised" (1997: 133). Prominent Spanish scholars have backed Cunliffe's position on this issue:

> It is absolutely essential to abandon once and for all the traditional interpretation that links the Peninsular Celts with the La Tène culture, a fact that has been used for decades as the criteria to exclude Iberia from the Celtic world, or at best refer to it as the setting for a strange and atypical regional group, the Celtiberians. Some European theories now explicitly recognise this fact, and

admit the existence of a group with its own identity that emerged before the migratory movements of the La Tène culture. This has also happened in interpretations relating to other European regions, as is the case with the Lepontic language and the Golasecca culture in Northern Italy (Lorrio and Ruiz Zapatero 2005:231).

Evidence of the early presence of Celtic peoples in the Iberian Peninsula has been drawn from sources in the fields of history, archaeology, linguistics, religion, mythology, oral literature and the arts (Alberro 2002, 2003, 2004b; Almagro-Gorbea 1991; Cunliffe 1997: 148-56; Koch 1991; Lenerz-de Wilde 1996; Lorrio and Ruiz Zapatero 2005). However, the Hispano-Celts were for a long time practically excluded from the Celtic world, since archaeological finds from the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures were scarce in this area, and did not provide enough evidence for a cultural scenario comparable to that of Central Europe. Furthermore, north of the Pyrenees Spanish archaeological studies were practically unheard of, and Spain was seriously under-represented in forums and European publications on the subject. All of this serves to explain why most of the studies on the Celts have either excluded the Celts from Iberia, or barely acknowledged their existence, let alone displayed any depth of knowledge on these people. However, increased scholarly interest in Iberia's Celtic connections has been a significant feature of the last decade: during the past few years, Iberian Celts have been included in several survey texts about the Celts: Cunliffe (1997:133-144 and 2003); Kruta (2000: 316-333); Collis (2003:122-123, 177-180); Haywood (2001: 44-45); Raftery and Twist (2001: 48-49, 113); Alberro and Arnold (2004-2008).

A turning point was the detection by Tovar in 1946 of several basic traits of the Celtiberian language, which has finally been accepted as a branch of the Celtic languages. This pioneering work was followed by several others: Lejeune (1955), Schmoll (1959) and Tovar himself (1948, 1949, 1950, 1955-56, 1961, 1985). The presence of a Celtic language in the Iberian Peninsula was definitively confirmed by the above-described Botorrita bronze tablets, which are considered the most important texts in any Celtic dialect (Beltrán and Tovar 1982; de Hoz and Michelena 1974; Eska 1989; Jordán Cólera 2004: 326ff; Meid 1993 and 1994: 7-28; Villar et al. 2001).

The early presence of large Celtic populations in the Iberian Peninsula is thus documented by sources in the fields of history, archaeology and linguistics. Reports of a Celtic presence in this extensive territory during the Iron Age (Hallstatt period, 700-500 BC) are many and reliable. However, many scholars maintain that the Celts were already settled in this area much earlier, towards the end of the Bronze Age, and that they occupied very extensive tracts of the Iberian Peninsula for centuries (Lenerz-de Wilde 1996; Lorrio 1997: *passim*, 1999:11-22; Powell 1983: 45-48). Herodotus, using information from Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 540-475 BC) and the reports of seafarers who described their trips to the "Tin Isles", was one of the first Classical authors to refer to the *Keltici* who dwelled in the Iberian peninsula "beyond the Pillars of Hercules", that is, to the West of Gibraltar (Lenerz-de Wilde 1996: 533; Rankin 1996:8). In his *Ora Maritima*, Rufus Festus Avienus described the Celtic tribe of the *Berybraces* or *Bebryces* as occupying the area by the River Tyrius (now the Turia) in the Iberian Peninsula (Hubert 1987: 289-90); he cited sources from the sixth century BC. Strabo, Poseidonius, Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy in his *Geographia* allude to Celtic tribes living in the northwest and southwest of the Iberian peninsula as well as to the Celtiberians of the northern-central plateau, while Diodorus, Strabo, Valerius Maximus, Silius Italicus, Justin and Livy, among other ancient authors, also described the Celtiberians and their characteristics. Well-known Celtiberian writers include Quintilian and Martial; the latter states in an epigram that he was born in 40 AD in the Celtiberian town of Bilbilis (Rankin 1996: 169-70, 186).

The main Celtic peoples of the Iberian Peninsula

The main Celtic groups of the Iberian Peninsula are the Celtiberians of the large eastern and central plateaux, the Celtici of the southwest, and the Gallaeci and other Celtic peoples of the northwest. The Celtiberians are the best-known and most researched group among the Celts of Spain, and according to many authors the ones who played the most important historical and cultural role (Lorrio 1997). Authors such as Burillo (2005) are of the opinion that the Celtiberians never constituted a real social, cultural, or political unit, thus the study of this group should be geared toward an analysis of the historical process that developed through an amalgamation of populations that inhabited a territory defined by Classical writers as Celtiberia. However, other scholars maintain that the Celtiberians constitute an archaeologically, linguistically, geographically and chronologically well-defined cultural system, extending from the sixth century BC to the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula and the period immediately afterwards (Almagro-Gorbea 1993; Lorrio 1997: 10). From the beginning of the second century BC on, the Celtiberi began to appear in reports describing the almost permanent conflicts they had with the Romans. Diodorus, Poseidonius, Strabo, Valerius Maximus, Silius Italicus, Justin and Livy, among other ancient authors, have described the Celtiberians and their characteristics.

The homeland of the Celtiberians lay in the northeastern region of Spain, stretching from the southern flank of the Ebro Valley to the Eastern Meseta (plateau). It was geographically described by Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy, and also has been defined by the distribution of inscriptions in the Celtiberian language written in the Latin or Iberian alphabet. The most famous of the numerous archaeological sites is Numantia, which was besieged and destroyed by Scipio in 133 BC and is now being studied by modern methods. The importance of Celtiberian Segeda is corroborated by its coin mints, whose output displays the city's name in Celtiberian (i.e. *sekeida*). Its two archaeological sites cover a substantial area: Segeda I, located on the hill of Mara, Zaragoza, was conquered and destroyed by the Romans in 153 BC, while Segeda II, Durón de Belmonte de Gracián, Zaragoza, was destroyed during the Sertorian Wars (Burillo Mozota 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001-2002, 2003). A large number of finds also have been made inside several hill-forts, locally called *castros* (Fernández Castro 1995: 356-57). The ethnic closeness and kinship between the Celtiberians and the rest of the Celts of the Iberian Peninsula, visible in the language, the social structure and especially in the shared ideology, have been described by Marco Simón (1989:117-23, 1993: 481-88;1998: *passim*). The Celtici of the southwest, on the other hand, in the territories of the historical Celtici described by Herodotus and other Classical authors, lately have been the subject of very productive archaeological work (Berrocal Rangel 1992, 2005; Júdice Gamito 1991).

The Celts in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula

Social and commercial relations between the peoples of the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula and those of Brittany and the British Islands date back to very remote times. Trade in tin between Ireland and Galicia was already established during the late Neolithic (MacCalister 1921:16), and the similarities in thousands of stone tombs found all along the coasts of Atlantic Europe could indicate that those contacts existed during the period of megalith construction as well (Eogan 1982). These ancient connections continued during the Bronze Age,

when a well-defined socio-cultural and commercial zone called the Atlantic Façade, Area, or Province included Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Wales, the Cornish Peninsula, Armorica (Brittany) and Galicia in Spain, and lasted for at least three millennia (Cunliffe 1997:148). Cunliffe affords northwestern Iberia particular importance within the zone, noting how the complex influence of western seaways converged "around the isolated yet reassuring stepping-stone of Galicia" (Cunliffe 2001:60). Koch has discussed the social basis of early celticization, presenting a model in which he argues that the consolidation of a proto-Celtic language took place during the Late Bronze Age (c.1300-600 BC) in the Atlantic Zone (1991:18-19). According to a number of authors, Celtic language(s) became the *lingua franca* for the whole area at the time (Alonso Romero 1976; Cunliffe 1997:148-56; Meijide 1994; Ruiz-Gálvez 1984: *passim*). Thus, enough evidence exists to indicate that several centuries before the Christian Era, the northwest of the Iberian peninsula was already integrated into the Atlantic world (Tranoy 1981:103), and that the contacts between Galicia and the Celtic Atlantic regions continued until the middle of the first millennium AD (Cunliffe 1997: 145-49).

Not long before the emergence of the Celts, an Indo-European pre- or proto-Celtic people had already settled in northwestern Iberia (Maluquer de Motes 1975: 130-31; Rankin 1996:6), a historical fact substantiated by epigraphic evidence (Tovar 1985:227-53). Strabo and Pliny described several tribes dwelling in the western regions of Iberia, among them the Celts; Herodotus refers to the Keltici in the west of the Iberian Peninsula and Pomponius Mela to the Celtici who had settled all along the northern and western coasts. Pliny left a list of the tribes living in the Conventus Lucensis (a large part of Galicia) in which he describes the regions inhabited by Celtic peoples (Tranoy 1981:41). This early presence of Celtic populations in the northwestern Iberian Peninsula is also confirmed by linguistic studies and archaeological finds (*Ibid*. 245-46).

During Emperor Diocletian's reign, the Romans created an administrative unit called Gallaecia that covered all of northwestern present-day Spain as well as the northern part of Portugal (Figure 1). Based on data collected from Classical authors and the inscriptions found in this area, some authors have described the numerous tribal groups, mostly Celtic, living in this extensive region (Maluquer de Motes 1963a: 17-21; Tranoy 1981:45-74). The Celtic presence in this area is clearly evidenced by the presence of many placenames ending in *-briga*, personal names, and the numerous mentions of the Celtici. The name *Gallaeci* or *Callaeci* appears for the first time in writing in Appio in 139 BC, when Q. Servilius Caepio invaded the region; for his military achievements, Decimus Junnius Brutus received the name of *Callaicus*. The main town of the Tiburi, *Mansio Nemetobriga*, was an important socio-political center (both components of this name, *nemetos-* and *-briga*, are clearly identified as Celtic), and one Celtic group, the *Gallaeci*, are estimated to have numbered some 300,000 individuals living in 24 settlements (Maluquer de Motes 1963a: 17-21; Tranoy 1981:45-74).

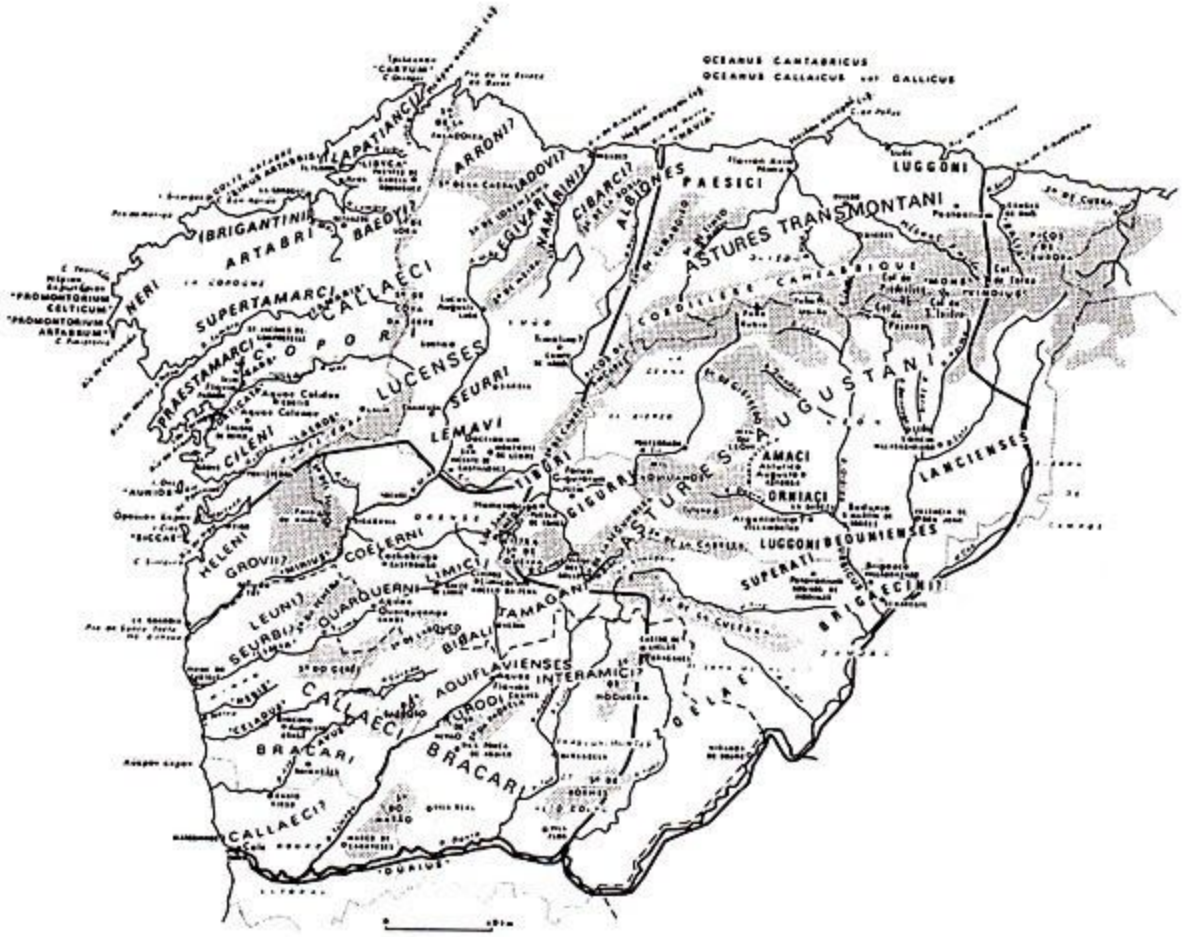

Figure 1. Map of Galicia (after Tranoy 1981).

Figure 2. Gold helmet of Leiro. (Museo Arqueolóxico e Histórico, Á Coruña. Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Various forms of evidence, mostly inscriptions and a number of place names ending in *-briga*, indicate that a Celtic language was spoken over much of central and western Iberia. The tribal name *Gallaeci* is enshrined in the modern name of Galicia. A few words with Celtic roots are still found in the agrarian vocabulary of rural Galicia, among them *aramio*, arable land; *labéga*, plough; *cheda*, a cart implement; *broa*, millet; and *bogalla*, acorn (Lorrio 1991: 27).

Philological evidence can also be obtained by a comparison between Galician linguistic remains and those of Celtiberia and Gaul (Albertos Firmat 1966 and 1975:52). Other indications of a Celtic presence found in this region include the numerous gold torques, sculpted stone heads wearing torques, Hallstatt and La Tène-style decorated jewelry such as the gold tiaras of Elviña and San Martín de Oscos, helmets (Figure 2), and a number of *castros* (hill-forts) with round houses typical of Celtic regions such as ancient Britannia and Ireland. The so-called *guerreros-galaicos*, life-size stone figures armed with daggers and shields found at the entrances of *castros*, also wear torques (Lenerz-de Wilde 1996: 547; Parcero 1999, 2000; Parcero and Cobas 2005).

Religious practices, traditions, cultural traits

Lugo, the capital city of one of the four provinces of Spanish Galicia that is also called Lugo, is a permanent memorial to the Celtic deity Lug. This is confirmed by epigraphic dedications on the three altars to Lug that have been found in this province (Olivares Pedreño 2002: 88-89). His name is also found in several inscriptions, dedications and placenames in the province of Lugo as well as in the Spanish regions bordering the Duero and Turia Rivers, and he was worshiped at a shrine in Peñalba de Villastar, Teruel (Fernández Castro 1995: 360; Marco Simón 1986; Sagredo and Hernández 1996:180ff). Other divinities worshipped in northwestern Spain include the famous Celtic goddesses Coventina, with two or perhaps three altars dedicated to her in Galicia (Alberro 2004c), and Navia, whose name is still present in a large town and one of the main rivers of this geographical area. Nemetobriga, a town that stood near Orense (one of the four capital cities of Galicia), derived its name from *nemeton* or sacred grove (MacCana 1983:14; Webster 1995: 448-49). On the basis of Roman documents, the many votive inscriptions found and other available sources, several authors have described and inventoried the most common divinities revered in ancient Gallaecia, most of them Celtic (Albertos Firmat 1952: 49-52; Navascués and Tovar 1950:178-88; Olivares Pedreño 2002: 67-99; Tranoy 1981:266-307). In one of these inventories alone (Navascués and Tovar), 188 divinities are listed.

The *Gallaeci*, following common Celtic practice, performed a number of ceremonies in an attempt to obtain help from the gods. These practices included animal and human sacrifices and divination: they examined the liver of their victims, the direction the birds flew, and some atmospheric phenomena such as thunder and lightning. They also performed ritual chants and dances, banged their battle shields, played flutes and trumpets and organized tournaments where warriors took part as individuals or in combat formation. Once a battle was over, they performed purification rites, made votive offerings and additional sacrifices that could include prisoners of war, oxen or even horses. The *Cantabri* even drank the blood of the horses they sacrificed (Caro Baroja 1974:240-61).

Figure 3. Two stone heads found inside the *castro* (hill-fort) of Cibdá de Armea. (Museo de Ourense. Photo: Alfredo Erias).

Figure 4. Four-faced stone head, Puentedeume, Á Coruña (Museo de Arqueoloxía, Á Coruña. Photo: Alfredo Erias).

The cult of the head (common to many other Celtic peoples) has many representations in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, especially in stone heads dated to the Iron Age found in *castros* of southern Galicia and northern Portugal (Alberro 2003-2004; Almagro-Gorbea and Lorrio 1992; Taracena 1943). Detailed examples of representations of *têtes coupées* found in Galicia and the north of Portugal are provided by González Ruibal (2005) at the following locations: Barán, Lugo; Monte Güimil, Pontevedra; two in Armeá, Ourense; Chaves, Portugal; Cortes, Lugo; San Cibrán de Las, Lansbrica, Ourense; Gaxate, Pontevedra; Ocastro, Pontevedra; Narla, Lugo; Monte Mozinho, Porto, Portugal. González Ruibal describes these sculptures as "characterized by very simple and crude representations of human heads, often in bas-relief, with owl faces. They closely resemble the pillars with *têtes coupées* from southern France ..." (2005: 135). This author also describes the Janiform heads of Amorín and Seixambre, Pontevedra; Francos, Á Coruña; and Óutara, Lugo; and the four-faced head of Pontedeume, Á Coruña. In fact, most of these Galician and Portuguese heads (Figures 3 and 4) show the typical Celtic style of representing the head as described by Ross (1967:120, 123) and Alberro (2006a).

Both Strabo and Ptolemy wrote that the villagers of this region used to gather together on nights with a full moon to perform sacred dances in front of their houses. This information is confirmed by the fact that these practices, in similar or comparable forms, continued in some remote tracts of this area (Viana del Bollo, Orense) until the beginning of the twentieth century (Caro Baroja 1974: 251). Some bronze discs found in Orense province and on the Portuguese side of the Miño River are indications of an astral cult dating from the Bronze Age. The numerous sacred symbols engraved on the stones of some *castros* are also significant: solar rays and swastikas, which, according to Tranoy (1981:117-18) could represent the religious role of the sun in the ideological beliefs of the inhabitants of this area.

The second century AD author Justin mentions a sacred mountain forest in Galicia where gold was protected by the gods and thus could not be extracted. In common with other Celtic peoples, wells, springs and streams were also sacred in this region. Together with this cult of mountains and water sources, there are signs of religious elements contained in the numerous zoomorphic sculptures found in southern Galicia and northern Portugal. In these two regions numerous sculptures representing animals such as wild pigs, hogs, and also bulls, similar to those found in the Galician provinces of Orense and Pontevedra, the regions of Tras-os-Montes and Minho on the Portuguese side, and farther away in the Spanish provinces of Segovia,

Avila, Cáceres, Salamanca and Zamora have been found (Maluquer de Motes 1963b: 94-95, 101-105). In general, in spite of Roman attempts to impose the Latin language and Roman customs, the villagers of Gallaecia managed to maintain a good part of their traditions, including their religious practices. Epigraphic evidence dating back to the first century AD shows the continuity of worship to pre-Roman divinities, most of them Celtic: Lug, Moelius, Navia, Ocaera, Turiacus and others (Tranoy 1981:361).

Celticization in the northwestern Iberian Peninsula

The northwest, which had played an important role in the Bronze Age Atlantic Area, also had an impact on the process of the celticization of the whole Peninsula. After several decades of unconvincing attempts by scholars to demonstrate that the celticization of the Iberian Peninsula took place through invasion waves from the La Tène area (Bosch Gimpera 1942), current Spanish research considers mono-causal invasionist theories as serious oversimplifications, adopting instead a model based on the assimilation of selected cultural elements by the indigenous elites. This model is in turn based on the existence of a cultural substratum with origins in the Atlantic Bronze Age cultural area of the northwestern Peninsula, which had already assimilated linguistic and ideological traits such as the use of a proto-Celtic or Celtic language, hill-forts (*castros*) with circular stone houses (Ayán et al. in press), certain burial rites, and religious ideologies and practices involving common divinities and religious sites such as springs, brooks, rivers, mountains and woods. This proto-Celtic substrate preserved in the northwest spread during the later Bronze and Iron Age to the highlands of the Iberian mountains and the Eastern plateau, where it developed into the culture of the Celtiberians. From there, it later spread to extensive areas of the north and west of the Peninsula, where it was easily absorbed by the proto-Celtic substratum. However, the proto-Celtic culture of the extreme northwest retained most of its cultural characteristics. Thus, the celticization of the Iberian Peninsula may have had its origin in the northwest, which could explain similar cultural, socio-economic, linguistic and ideological patterns (Almagro-Gorbea 1992, 1993: 146-48; Cunliffe 1997: 139).

Celtic immigration to northwestern Iberia during the fifth century AD

At the time when the Angles and the Saxons arrived in Britain, for reasons that have not yet been determined, several Celtic tribes from the south of the island emigrated to the Armorican peninsula (Brittany) and some of them even farther to the northwest of the Iberian peninsula where they landed in the westernmost coast of today's province of Asturias (Berresford Ellis 1993b: 56-7). Spanish historians have recorded this Celtic immigration and landing as having taken place in Galicia between El Ferrol and the River Eo (Orlandis 1975: 48-9), while García y García (1986) maintains that Celtic and Breton tribes arrived in Galicia as early as the end of the fourth century AD. These relatively recent Celtic colonies managed to maintain their own culture, identity and peculiar religious structures, and were recognized as such in the Council of Lugo that took place in the year 567 AD. They were granted their own Christian See, known as Britonia or Bretoña, with headquarters in a monastery of their own. Their bishop, Mahiloc o Mailoc (*prelado de la Britonensis ecclesia*), who, according to Spanish historians had led this group of Britons to that area, signed the acts of the Second Council of Bracarense which took place in Braga in the year 572 AD (García y García 1986:124). These Celtic colonies expanded further, and their numerous inhabitants contributed to the fact that the region retained its

Roman-given name of Gallaecia (today's Galicia). The Moors ravaged the See of Bretoña in AD 830, but it continued to exist at least until the Council of Oviedo in AD 900. This *Britonensis ecclesia* was located in Bretoña, in the province of Lugo, a locality that still keeps that name. Relatively recent archaeological excavations have uncovered the remains of this church and of a large *castro* (Chamoso Lamas 1967, 1975; Young 2002).

Several writers describe the contacts between northwestern Spain and Ireland, as well as the various expeditions by Celtic-Irish monks who arrived in Galicia during the so-called "Age of the Saints" in the fifth to first centuries AD. Some historians today speak of a "Celtic thalassocracy" which, they argue, extended in the first centuries of the Christian era from the kingdom of Dalriada to Galicia in Spain (Lewis 1958: Chap. II, *passim*). Bowen (1977: *passim*) has studied the considerable activity along the Atlantic sea-routes during this "Age of the Saints" in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. An example of these maritime expeditions found in the oral tradition and the Irish medieval manuscripts is the *Immram Curaig Ua Corra*, or Uí Corra boat with nine men aboard, among them a bishop and a priest, which landed at "the corner of Spain" (Galicia), where the travellers founded a church (Alonso Romero 1991:55-57; Best and O'Brien 1956; Dillon and Chadwick 1973:242).

Northwestern Spain and Portugal today and the new Celtic revival

The position of Galicia within the Celtic world has long been the subject of contention, with scholars describing the region's Celtic heritage while institutions of pan-Celticism point to the region's failure to meet the required "linguistic criterion" for inclusion. This has not prevented an increasingly self-confident and assertive Galicia from proclaiming a self-defined Celtic identity that has found its expression today in a range of musical festivals and other cultural activities. The Celtic revival in the music and the arts that is now taking place in many parts of the world is also evident in northwestern Spain and Portugal. Among the visible cultural signs of the "Celtic" vitality present today in that region is the persistence of old attitudes, customs (Figures 5 and 6a, b), and other small but important details such as the retention of the old Celtic place-names (Figure 7) and the traditions and ways of life derived from the Celtic past. Today's inhabitants, even if they constitute a minority within the Spanish kingdom and have been forgotten on the northwestern Atlantic fringe of that large peninsula, have now achieved a substantial political autonomy. They form the Comunidad Autónoma de Galicia constituted by the four provinces of Á Coruña, Lugo, Orense and Pontevedra, and the Comunidad (Principado) de Asturias, both autonomous regions created under the Spanish constitution in 1978.

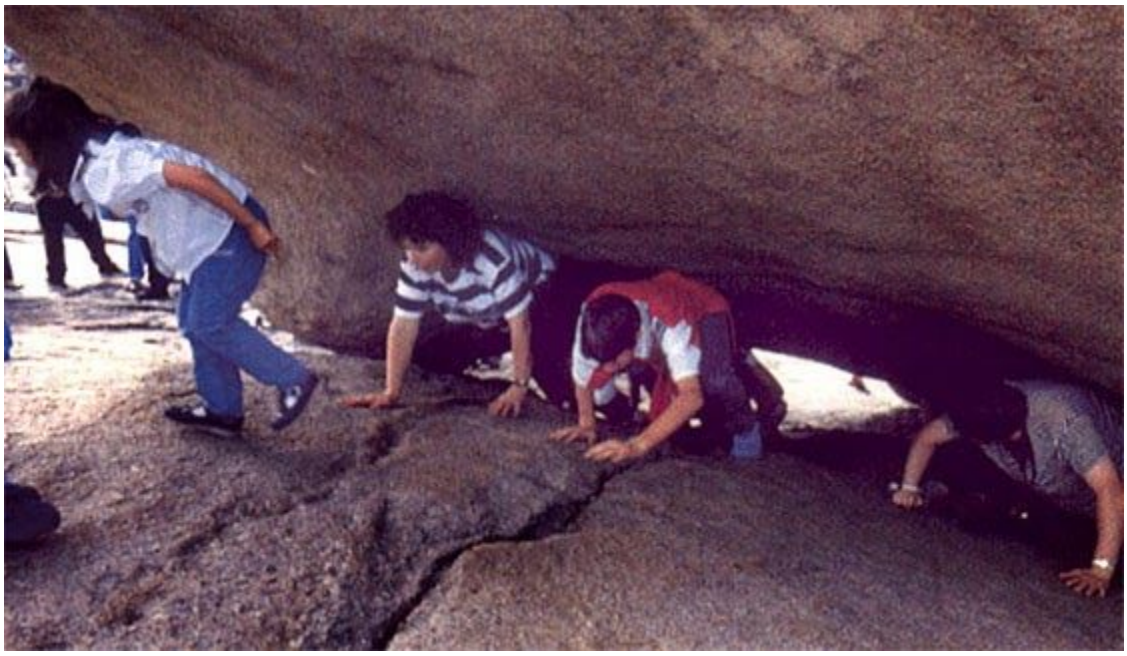

Figure 5. Pilgrims going through the "Pedra dos Cadrís" (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia). This ritual, supposed to provide general well-being and a cure for infertility, arthritis and other disabling diseases, is also performed in Ireland and other Celtic regions. A typical example is Men-an-Tol in Cornwall.

Figures 6a and 6b. Two ancient sacred wells. One of them, now "christianized", is St Margarita, Bello, Corcoesto, Cabana, Á Coruña, Galicia (Photo: Alfredo Erias); the other one is Madron Well, Cornwall (Photo: Dena Blakeman). The ritual is in both cases the same: after obtaining the benefits of the sacred water, the pilgrims leave an offering to the well in the form of a white rag tied to a bush.

Figure 7. Celtic heritage in Galicia: a sign pointing the way to the village of Celtigos, in the Province of Lugo (Photo: M. Almagro Gorbea).

A number of *castros* (Celtic hill-forts) that have been partially restored by local archaeologists are presented now for all to see in a relatively good condition. In Galicia these include the following sites: San Cibrán de Las (whose old Celtic name, as it appears in an inscription, was Lansbrica), Baroña (Figure 8), Tegra (Figures 9a and b), Borneiro (Figure 10), Fazouro, Viladonga, Elviña, Troña and Cerdeira. In Asturias, Coaña (Figure 11), Chano in León (Figure 12), Póvoa do Varzim in the north of Portugal (Figure 13) can be cited, among many others. Gold torques, diadems, tiaras, amulets, charms, ear-rings, necklaces and bracelets; stone sculptures of warriors, and single (separate) heads (Blanco Teijeiro 1956); all of these have been found inside and outside the *castros* (González Ruibal 2005; Parcero and Cobas 2006), including evidence from *stelae*, altars and tomb-stones (Figure 14a and b).

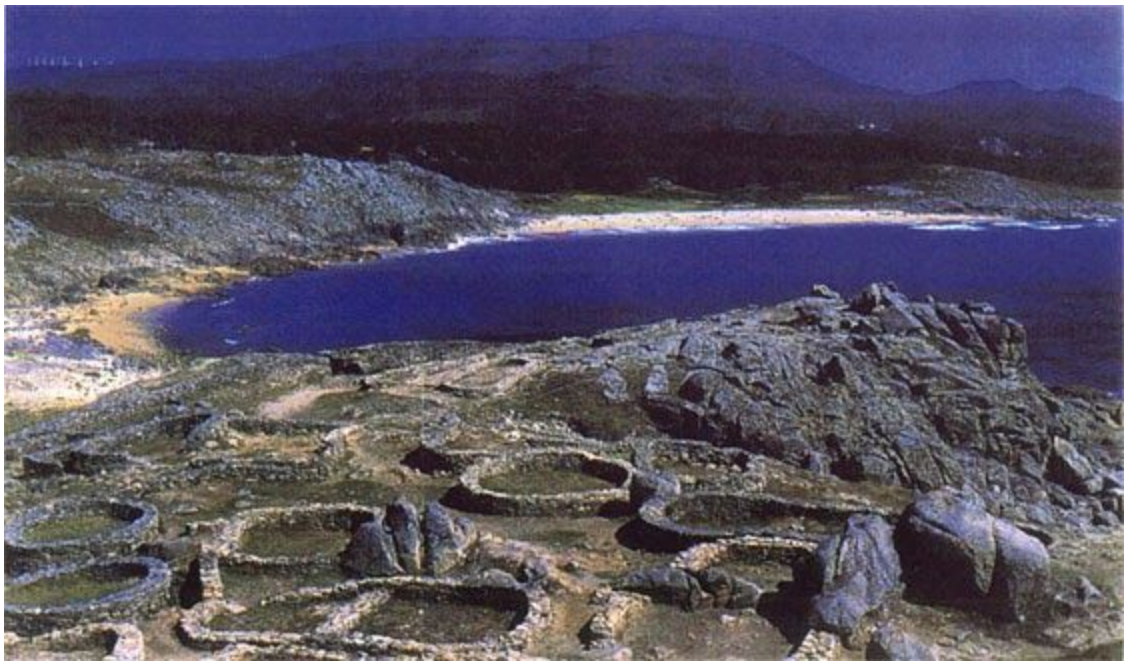

Figure 8. *Castro* (hill-fort) de Baroña, Galicia, Spain (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Figure 9a. *Castro* de Tegra, Galicia, Spain (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Figure 9b. One of the round houses inside *Castro* de Tegra (reconstruction). (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Figure 10. *Castro* de Borneiro, Galicia. (Photo: Alfredo Erias).

Figure 11. *Castro* de Coaña (Photo: L. Alberro).

Figure 12. *Castro* de Chano (Photo: L. Alberro).

Figure 13. *Castro* de Póvoa do Varzim, in northern Portugal. (Photo A. Erias).

Figure 14a and b. 14a. A tombstone to "Apana, filla de Ambolo, Celtica Supertamarica, do castro de ... obre ..." set up by her brother. Found in 1994 in San Pedro de Mera, Prov. of Lugo, now at Museo Arqueológico de Lugo. The prefix *amb-* in the father's name, Ambolo, and the suffix *obre-* of the *castro* (Celtic hill-fort) where she dwelled before her death, are clearly Celtic. The Celtic Supertamarci are historically recorded as living in the extreme northwest of Galicia at the time of the Roman conquest (Fig. 1). The absence of a cross or any other Christian symbol means that the Supertamarci were still pagans when the stela was erected (Tranoy 1981; Ares Vázquez 1997:10-21). (Photo: Museo Arqueológico de Lugo). 14b. Drawing of 14a. (Drawing: Alfredo Erias).

Among the most visible signs of Celtic heritage present today in northwestern Spain are the Celtic place-names, the numerous Celtic hill-forts (*castros*) with circular houses (Ayán et al. 2006-2007), as well as the practice of story telling and some of the stories themselves, which are almost identical to those told in Ireland (Caulfield 1981:205-15). Alonso Romero (1990, 1991) has amply described the persistence of Celtic traditions in Galicia while the similarities between the folklore, rituals, traditions, and superstitions of Galicia and those of the Celtic countries have been recently researched by Alberro (2000 and 2001).

Re-enacted ancient feasts and music festivals

Celts and celticity are now attracting an enormous interest in many villages of Galicia where the inhabitants, especially the young people, are anxious to re-introduce archaic feasts, rites and traditions. The main events of this kind today include *Festa dos Fachóns da Vila do castro* in Castro Candelas; the *Fiesta Castrexa* in Xunqueira de Ambía; the *Festival of Lugnasad* held in Bretoña, Lugo (the religious center of the

above mentioned Celts who arrived from Britain in the fifth century); and Fiesta das Fachas in Taboada, Lugo (Alonso Romero 2000: personal communication; Xunta de Galicia 2000). Furthermore, in the village of Narón, Parish of Sedes, (Santo Estevo), the local council has now re-installed with great success an ancient market/feast that has many of the characteristics of an Irish *óenach* (Alberro 2006). Regarding this ancient assembly, Marco V. García Quintela (2005) describes a site in Galicia (A Ferradura), and an epithet referring to an indigenous deity, *Oenacus*, which he associates with an Irish *óenach*.

Figure 15. Annual Celtic Festival, Ortigueira, La Coruña, Galicia (Ayuntamiento de Ortigueira).

Music festivals are also held now at many Galician locations; the most famous and successful of these events is the three-day International Celtic Music Festival at Ortigueira, Province of A Coruña, held yearly 13-15th of July, and attended by thousands of visitors and many famous singers and musicians from all the Celtic countries and regions (Figure 15). The Council of Bag-Pipers of Asturias has 1500 pipers registered in that province. In the city of Ourense, one of the four provincial capitals of Galicia, there are 5000 registered pipers, and 9000 in the whole region of Galicia. Furthermore, there is a prestigious School of Bag-Piping in Galicia, and each important city in the region has its own local school (Chatto 1992: 16). There is also a "Celto-Galaican Association" of pipers. The regional Department of Culture of Galicia has supplied the writer with a long list of active performers of traditional music, among them 140 folklore groups, 11 dance-groups and 61 choirs. This list does not include hundreds of bagpipe bands that perform at the local or village level (Figures 16 and 17). The Band of the Bagpipers School of Ourense, conducted by Xose Lois Foxo, participates every year in the Saint Patrick's Day Parade in New York (Figures 18, 19a and b).

Figure 16. Bag-pipe band, Galicia, Spain (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Figure 17. Bag-pipe band, Galicia, Spain (Photo: Consellería de Cultura, Xunta de Galicia).

Figure 18. The Royal Band of Ourense playing in front of the Castle of Pambre, Galicia. (Photo: Xose Lois Foxo).

Figure 19a and b. The Royal Band of Ourense, Saint Patrick's Day Parade, New York, 2000 (Photo: Xose Lois Foxo).

The music

The bagpipe, at one time a very popular musical instrument in the whole of Europe, was gradually relegated to the countryside and little by little lost status in the main cultural and musical centers (Collinson 1975: 212). However, various types of bagpipe survived in the rural areas and, curiously enough, this happened mostly in typical Celtic regions such as Ireland, Scotland and Brittany as well as in the regions of Asturias and Galicia in Spain and in northern Portugal. In the latter areas, instead of disappearing, the bagpipe continued to constitute an important part of the local culture and people, who were anxious to maintain their ancient roots. Both in Asturias and Galicia the bagpipe is still a much loved and popular instrument, almost a symbol. At the annual Fête Inter-Celtique of Lorient, and the main Celtic festivals of Ireland, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland, musicians and groups from Galicia and Asturias perform today, and there are many Celtic music groups in these areas. Furthermore, several distinguished and respected musicians have recently "discovered" the similarities between the music of Galicia, Asturias and northern Portugal and that of the "traditionally" Celtic countries and regions. Among these can be mentioned the world famous Paddy Moloney of *The Chieftains*, Mike Oldfield, and the talented composer, harp player and singer Loreena MacKennitt.

Conclusions

Historical, archaeological, linguistic and cultural sources of evidence point to the retention of Celtic heritage in northwestern Spain and northern Portugal, in spite of the fact that the Celtic languages once spoken there were lost due to the Roman occupation of those areas. The abundance of Celtic placenames, the numerous Celtic hill-forts (*castros*) with round houses, representations of *têtes coupées*, gold torques and stone heads wearing torques, inscriptions, dedications to Lug and other Celtic deities, the continuing practice of story-telling and the stories themselves, and a number of cultural factors tend to support this assertion.

If the term Celtic, as defined by Bettina Arnold and D.B. Gibson, "appears to be almost dangerously non-specific when applied indiscriminately to ... different cultural and sociological groups" (1995:2), perhaps the celticity of the people of northwestern Spain could be more simply ascertained by following Barry Cunliffe's assertion that "... a Celt is a person who believes him or herself to be Celtic" (Cunliffe 1997:267). Most of the people of Galicia are, like the people of Brittany described by Maryon McDonald (1989: 99), "self-conscious and self-defining Celts". Fredrick Barth similarly concluded "that the only sure indication of identity is self-ascription, or what people say that they are" ... (1969: 15), and the fact is that many among the present population of Galicia do indeed believe and feel that they are Celts.

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